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ABSTRACT

Since the mastery of any subject matter depends on learning its key concepts--its language--content area teachers should use innovative vocabulary development exercises to help their students master the language of the subject area. Teachers should try to coordinate vocabulary study with other learning tasks instead of depending on dull, artificial word drills. Vocabulary development activities should stimulate each student's natural curiosity; they also need to be structured yet varied, reflecting different student needs and learning styles. Some potentially helpful activities include building "language trees" and "rainbows of words," using the letters of students' names to generate new words, focusing on parts of words to expand word power from one content area to another, applying word identification skills to a "name hunt" game, matching words with their definitions and with examples of the use in context, and answering questions about jobs to learn occupational nouns. (A list of 55 techniques for teaching words is attached.) (RL)

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STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES TO BUILD AND EXPAND VOCABULARY IN CONTENT MATERIALS

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STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES TO BUILD AND EXPAND VOCABULARY IN CONTENT MATERIALS

Premis One: Knowing the meanings of individual words is basic to meaningful reading.

Premis Two: The teaching of technical vocabulary of content is often synonymous with concept development.

Premis Three: One conversation across the table from a wise man is often worth a month's reading.

Reading is a developmental process. More attention should be paid to this statement than just mouthing the words.

The process of learning to read is not mastered at any one particular time such as age 10 or 12. Nor can it be assumed that the ultimate ability to read is achieved at any particular time on the educational continuum.

A child may be an adequate reader in Grade Three, be less efficient in Grade Four, and be in serious trouble in Grade Five. Reading is a total integrated response made up of a large number of separate skills, abilities, memory patterns, etc. Mere recognition of words at any level is not reading, but an individual with no sight vocabulary is not a reader. A five per cent handicap in word recognition may cause failure. A ten per cent handicap is serious. Frustration is inevitable, and frustration leads to hostility.

How does one learn? Michael Rossman says it is not so mysterious. Let them do it. But the MAGIC of learning just doesn't happen, and schools can't make it happen. Worthwhile learning is unique and personal. What students can learn outside on their own in the streets and behind the barn may teach them more than some of our classrooms. But guided by schools attuned to them, it is so much easier and faster.

While sensations, images, percepts, memories, concepts, and generalizations are best learned step-by-step in most cases, there are many students who can skip some steps and others who must take half steps and not learn though guided in all. Why can one child grasp something quickly and another have to be told 77 times and learn slowly or not at all?

Content books often cause problems for students who have little difficulty in basals or trade books in which they are interested. This discrepant performance may occur because of lack of motivation or because they simply cannot meet the reading challenges inherent in technical content areas. That student achievement can be improved when reading instruction takes place in conjunction with all content area instruction was verified by research done by Herber and Sanders in 1969.

Students have a build-in motor for learning -- curiosity. Too many times this motor is inhibited, even turned off, in some of our classrooms.

Have you read the papers lately? Watched TV? Attended a Parent Teachers Association meeting where concerned parents voiced their feelings and concerns?

People all around us are lamenting that students aren't learning in our schools. Are they right? If students aren't learning, why not? The point that should be made and stressed, I believe, is that schools are not just bodies of students and teachers. It can be illustrated by use of the analogy of a ball team.

The BALLS are the students.
The BATS are the teachers.
The UMPIRES are the administrators.
And HOME PLATES are the parents.

If one member of the team wins, we all win. If one fails, we all fail.

How many of you read the comic strip "Peanuts?" In one episode Linus is holding fast to a blanket in one hand and eating a sandwich with the other. Snoopy, the dog, hears the sound of food and licks his chops in anticipation. For a moment Linus is torn between the dog's beseeching look and his own hunger. He solves the dilemma by pulling his blanket over his head, thus assuming that he can continue to eat without having to face a hungry friend.

Some adults, no less than little Linus, tend to reach for a protective cover when a call for real caring comes. Some, I said. But most of us care or we wouldn't be in this profession. We must let our students know that we care. We must let them know that we

consider it a privilege and an opportunity to know and work with them. This is done with body language, but most of all by our words. It is a challenge and an opportunity to help students find lasting pleasure and satisfaction from working with words. After all, words lead to comprehensive reading as well as to listening, thinking, writing, and speaking. I want my students to react positively to what I attempt to do or have them do in the classroom. It's up to me to see that they do so. Begin where they are. Use them and their living emotions and energy to motivate for vocabulary expansion.

To master any subject matter, one must learn its key concepts--that is, its language. These concepts include not only technical terms, but also its principles and generalizations, its language which may have a different meaning in another content. Edgar Dale says

a) words are for conceptualizing. A concept is a generalized idea about a class of objects or events.

b) words are for building a good mind, one that compares, contrasts, and classifies.

c) words are for communicating, sharing ideas, understanding the world around us.

d) words are for filing, retrieving and reorganizing information.

One of the big problems in schools is forgetting. Why? The materials are not interesting. We have no incentive to remember them. The materials are not relevant, nothing to do with our lives as we live them. The materials are underlearned. We may not even understand the concepts presented. Usually, we don't file and organize with one exposure to a word or idea. Therefore, students need a systematic and planned program of vocabulary development. They need to see interrelationships of words. They need practices that govern formation of words and concepts.

One of my favorite activities for this is the Language Tree. Using any word part, such as meter, graph, mono, biblio, etc., see how many words the students can find to build the tree. The word part being used (for instance, meter) becomes the trunk of the tree. Students see how many branches they can add. There are at least one hundred meter words they could find. Student groups can take a different word part and compete in building trees. It becomes a

beautiful art project for the walls of the school hallways and gets the entire student body interested in words. I've seen it happen more than once.

A variation of the same idea is the "Rainbow of Words" activity. Make your bulletin board, chalkboard or newsprint paper on the walls of the halls into a rainbow design. A different color word is assigned to each section and students are to think of as many color words as they can to fill in the assigned section. For example: the color blue. Some words might be sky, baby boy, winning, loneliness, etc.

"I'd rather do it myself" is relevant in classrooms. Most educators, grades one through twenty-one tell too much. We spoonfeed. Students prefer to discover some things for themselves. This becomes the fun and the challenge. The multi-news media succeed with this programming daily. Puzzles, riddles, games, contests, especially word games. Why not the same ideas using the vocabulary of our concent materials in classrooms!

Take a sheet of paper. Write your first name vertically down the side of the page. Now think of two words which begin with each letter of your name, two positive words which tell something good about you. Spelling doesn't count on this one, or the teacher can spell the words for those who need help. You decide.

After two minutes, play around with what they did. Some won't be able to think of words--lack of vocabulary or poor self-concept. As a class, come up with the needed words, Dictionaries may be used.

Ask what they just did? What have they discovered? A definition for an adjective. Not a canned, dry, dull book definition, but a live, fun-filled, action, personal definition which makes sense to them and which they will never forget.

Discovery, freedom to learn, open classrooms do not mean leaving students rudderless in an environment which is merely filled with things. Things must have (1) purpose, (2) structure, (3) and fulfill student needs. In our nation today where schools are getting blamed for all the ills of society, teachers and Boards of Education are sometimes over-reacting and doing all sorts of strange things in the name of education. Many students are being what I call "skilled to death" but still don't read or learn. They have boxes, ditto

sheets, check lists, programmed junk (that's what many of them call it) and are all too often bored to death and have no motive for learning to read.

Everything done in our classrooms should be based on three things:

1) diagnosis of students -- their strengths and weaknesses
2) the curriculum demands and
3) the learning styles of students.

Teachers have a teaching style. They present information and wonder why students do not learn. One of the things we must face is Number Three above. If one teaching style fails to produce learning, then we must adapt our styles of presenting information to fit the learning style of students. Otherwise, we are wasting our time. "They get it or else," must change to "They get it, or I change my way of presentation."

Expanding vocabulary, word power, comprehension in one content area can lead to expansion in other content areas. It doesn't matter which teacher talks about the word part mono. Once learned, it works in all areas. Challenge students to transfer, to use this knowledge (it doesn't happen or transfer automatically). When they learn something about language, or anything else, have them develop the habit of thinking about how and where it might apply. Look at our one word part example. Mono, Greek for one.

history--monarchy
math--monomial
art--monochrome
music--monotone
religion--monotheism
reading--monosyllabic
health--mononucleosis
geography--monocline
chemistry--monomer
physics--monochromatic
literature--monodrama
drama--monologue
business--monopoly
science--nonocotyledon
marriage and the family--monogamy
physical education--monogram
shop--nonocycle

Older students have been exposed to phonic rules, to syllabication generalization, to structural analysis, to memorizing dictionary rules, so merely repeating this information will not motivate them to be better word decoders. One way to call attention to things they need to know, to review, or to learn is to do exercises using the

concepts which relate to them personally. "Name Hunt" is one such activity. Teachers use first names of students and make clues for each first name. In this activity you can use concepts such as phoneme, synonym, digraph , schwa, derivations, diminutives, homophones, tense of verbs, long and short vowel sounds -- in fact, I know of no word identification skill you couldn't use. Figure out these examples.

1) This name has a first syllable which rhymes with the silk a spider makes, plus the schwa sound. Then add a spirited expression used in cheers by students at football games.
2) Divide this name into three parts. a) synonym for dad b) objective form of I c) sixth note of the musical scale.
3) This name has the same first two sound clusters as a word used for a rope used for tethering cattle.

One of the favorite activities of many students and teachers is the use of study guides and/or games to practice and play with words. These two variations have motivated my students to more awareness of the things found in dictionaries and finite differences in terms.

A. Activity: Matching

Directions: Here are words dealing with the subject of TIME. How many are familiar to you? Match the word in Column I with the meaning in Column II and how it could be used or by whom in Column III. Use the dictionary if you need to.

Column I	Column II	Column III
___epoch	a. yearly	1. session in Congress
___era	b. occurring in daytime	2. history lesson
___annual	c. two times a year	3. farmer talking of planting season
___biennial	d. ten years	4. minister preaching
___decade	e. 14 days	5. lesson in geology
	f. period marked by distinctive periods of developments	

The use of three columns and having more in some columns than in others makes the activity a cognitive task rather than a guessing game.

B. Activity: Expanding Vocabulary Through Questions (Job Card)

Directions: Read the question. Decide upon key word or words. Use reference books which will give you an answer in the shortest length of time. Answer yes or no and explain your answer.

1. Does a paleonthologist lose his hair in winter?
2. If a friend called you a sesquipedalian, would you consider him truthful?
3. You are sitting on the patio with friends listening to the sound of spring. "I've never seen such an exaltation of larks," one comments. Is he talking about their music?

In READING STRATEGIES AND READING ACTIVITIES FOR GRADES 4-9 (Merrill, 1977), I talk about 55 ways to motivate for, to teach, and/or reinforce vocabulary. (see addendum). It doesn't have to be dull, dry, drill which students resent and consider a waste of time. Language acquisition can be one of the most exciting adventures upon which you and your students will ever embark. And the content areas of the curriculum have the materials to work with. Once students are motivated to work on the language (words) of these materials, they will be on their way to understanding it.

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Vocabulary--The Basics of Reading, Speaking, Writing, Listening, Thinking

I. Fifty-five Techniques for Teaching Words

1. labeling
2. falsh cards
3. concrete objects
4. dramatization, puppet shows, pantomime, charades, and so on
5. categorizing and/or classifying
6. etymology
7. structural analysis
8. phonic analysis
9. experience charts
10. trades
11. word lists that belong to the same families
12. by example
13. audio-visuals
14. compound words from known sight words
15. words change meaning (the number 13 symbol has at least one dozen meanings)
    (the word run has more than 100 meanings)
16. in giving directions
17. by using choral readings
18. in music
19. analogies
20. use of thesaurus/word-finder
21. job cards for expanding vocabulary through questions
22. be a good model - use them in giving directions and general conversations
23. use the chalkboards
24. read to students
25. games, puzzles, brainteasers, riddles, etc.
26. study guides using the dictionary
27. by association or relationships with known words
28. paired associates (usually go together)
29. complete the series
30. experiments
31. collect strange words
32. notebook and/or vocabulary cards
33. descriptive terms to build word power
34. programmed kits, workbooks, and related materials
35. meaningful experiences
36. descriptive terms associated with some category

    WORDS IN CONTEXT

37. synonym clues
38. antonym clues
40. author uses other words to explain new terms
41. meaning of the sentence containing a new term is restated
42. a new word compared with a known idea
43. meaning is inferred
44. words in a series clue (they all relate to one subject)
45. unknown words summarize several ideas which precede it
46. word meaning derived from linguistic pattern of the sentence
47. tone and mood clue
48. new term explained in footnotes or glossary
49. direct explanation is given
50. example is given in text
51. connotations
52. stretch the imagination by: figures of speech, emotional reactions
53. use the syntax to build word power
54. concrete and abstract part experience clues
55. conversation for vocabulary development